

THE UNIVERSITY STATION DIRECTOR FACES HIS PROBLEMS*

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Some time ago a noted educator whose name you all know said to me, "McCarty, you are in an enviable position. Why, I'd rather be director of a state radio station than president of a state university. Think of your opportunity! Think of the greater number of people you have the chance to serve! The whole state, all ages, and all kinds to educate and improve."

I smiled and thanked him for the encouragement. I passed off the remark as mere pleasantries. Yet I do think seriously of that opportunity he mentioned. I think of it often when problems pile up, when the way seems uncertain. For naturally, such an opportunity is accompanied by obstacles. And I propose to hold before you today a few of the problems of the university station director, as I see them. This, by the way, is not a survey of the opinions of others. For the most part it is a personal analysis of experiences in the growth of one station. It may not be typical, for university aims and administrative methods elsewhere may differ. But it should be representative of stations operated by universities under a broad concept of educational service to the entire commonwealth.

As the station director faces his problems; he sees that the first big job he has is that of convincing enough people that a publicly-supported broadcasting service will give them something they can get in no other way. Not many people, you must realize, are actively dissatisfied with things as they are in radio. Not many see the quiet conflict between education and entertainment, a competition in which education is generally, if not always, the loser. Few are aware of the denial of education's rights in the licensing of facilities. They are unaware of the half-hearted and shifting support given to educational programs by commercial broadcasters. They see minor annoyances and complain of them, yes, but fundamental flaws are obscured by the gloss of great entertainment, fine music, and spectacular broadcasts from afar:

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Unconsciously, many people have come to think of broadcasting in America as being represented entirely by the big national networks. That, of course, is a compliment to the general appeal of network programs and a recognition of their dominance of the broadcasting scene. It is a tribute to the popular techniques which characterize most chain features, techniques derived for the most part from other fields of commercialized entertainment. But such an attitude of passive acceptance does not acknowledge the constant denial of privilege and the frequent insult to good taste found in the programs and the insistent commercialism of hundreds of stations during many hours of every broadcast day. Let us not judge American broadcasting solely by a few of its outstanding national offerings from six P.M. to ten P.M. Let's take account also of the hours of insufferable stuff and wasteful duplication from countless local stations throughout the day and into the night. Nor should we give the networks a vote of complete confidence, if I may be permitted to say so.

As I have said, not many people are alert to the weaknesses of American radio practice. Too many are satisfied to take what they can get and be grateful. Whatever they get is a gift, they feel. They either have not cared or dared to question, criticize, and reject.

Then, what doubles our discouragement is this, that distinguished educators, even university presidents, have failed to see the importance of safeguarding education's interests on the air. They have been indifferent, thoughtless, or -- misled. They have acquiesced in the status quo. Scientists have neglected the objective view which says, "These are the facts; the decision is yours." They have accepted the impossible competitive basis set up between education and entertainment. They have permitted the acquisition and the use of radio facilities as a medium of mass appeal upon lines of least resistance. They have failed to recognize the discrimination against education as such, which naturally results from such a policy.

So the university station director comes face to face with the fact that all about him is a lack of understanding and considerable indifference to the high purpose and deep social need for the educational station. His own faculty, as a whole, is tolerant and mildly interested. They are preoccupied. Certain individuals are eagerly helpful, anxious to explore. A few close advisers are loyal and devoted. But by and large the radio director meets with minds that have not reached far ahead to find means of adapting radio to their fields of professional interest. He finds acknowledgment of the social potentialities of radio in oratory but not in action.

The university radio director's first job, then, is to grasp and hold fast to an ideal of unselfish public service, a radio service not possible where the chief and often the sole objective is private gain. He must keep ever before him a big concept of the complete job to be done by radio. Guided by this goal he sets out to select, adapt, and extend the influences of the state's educational agencies. And it is then that he encounters the specific problems of which I want to speak now.

For simplicity and easy-remembrance I have classified these problems under four headings: (1) Facilities, (2) Finances, (3) Programs, and (4) Promotion.

Now it's easy to get into a circle with these four problems. They chase each other around endlessly. One director will say, "Give us enough money, and we can get everything else -- facilities, time, talent, publicity - everything." Another says, "How can you expect to get financial support until you get the facilities, a station powerful enough to reach the people to show them what you can do for them?"

"I disagree with you," says a third director. "The program is the key to this whole thing. If we can only put on educational programs to match the appeal of commercial entertainment, then our problems are solved."

"Maybe so," says a fourth, "But before you can get programs or money, you've got to have the backing of people and organizations who believe in what you're doing. You must work out an effective plan of promotion to get support."

And so it goes -- a pinwheel chasing itself in a whirl. Which comes first? Which is most important - Facilities, Finances, Programs, or Promotion? I don't know. Perhaps we had better line them up and try to keep them abreast in the race against all other opposition. Our cheering section is too small to be divided up anyway.

This much is certain. Money, talent, and publicity must wait, at least at the start, for facilities. A transmitter and a license to use it must come first. And here the university station director today bumps his head up against a big wall. "Sorry," he is told, "no facilities for reaching an entire state left. Sorry, no night hours available." Here is that tight, unstretchable broadcast band rising up in front of the university station director. He must go through, around, under, or over this obstruction -- but how?

Problem Number One, then: To secure a broadcast frequency and power assignment to enable the university station to

reach all the people of the state with dependable reception day and night. No educational station director has yet completely solved this problem. Against the physical limitations of the broadcast band, the obstacle of entrenched commercial interests, and the disposition of the federal regulating body to make allotments without full consideration of social uses, this is undoubtedly the greatest problem the university station director faces.

Now, anyone who knows anything at all about broadcasting assignments must recognize the difficult task before the Federal Communications Commission and be sympathetic towards the Commission's efforts at achieving fair distribution. I would not presume to suggest a solution to this problem. The recent allocation hearing which resulted in volumes of testimony may help to do that. As we know, there are plenty of reasons given for the limited place on the air now occupied by educational institutions. And educators themselves must shoulder a good share of the blame for this poor showing. It is often explained why it is so difficult to find or to improve frequency and power assignments for educational institutions. The limitations of the broadcast band, the restrictions of natural laws of physics and engineering -- this is the chief explanation.

But no one has fully explained why education, upon which everything else depends -- our civilization, our culture, our prosperity -- must take what's left, or rather what isn't left. It was thoughtless of education to come so late to the facilities banquet, to find only crumbs left. But may I suggest that perhaps some of the greedy guests who arrived early may have stuffed their pockets with more than they need? Or they may be too impolite altogether to partake longer of public courtesy. Out of the October allocation hearing will come some help, we expect. At any rate the case for education on the air was presented by representatives of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters and the National Committee on Education by Radio. We hope the basic questions they raised will not be obscured by the major conflict within the industry between super-power stations and regional stations.

Problem Number Two, you remember, is: Finances. The university station director must sooner or later face the fact that good broadcasting is expensive, that his station must have money, real money. He has been spoiled by the unselfishness of faculty and student workers. He may have thought in the beginning that with a microphone, an operator, and perhaps a stenographer he could run a broadcasting station. He could take advantage of the abundance of free help -- teachers who recognized the opportunity to extend their services, students

"thrilled" with the novel experience, and amateur performers anxious to share their musical and dramatic talents with others. There is this rich source of talent and potential talent, needing only guidance and training. But to give training, to maintain a high and continuing standard today, next month, next year, and the year after, the director is forced to admit that he needs a staff, and a big staff. He needs announcers, production men, writers, program planners, researchers, and secretaries. He needs technical operators, construction engineers, and experimenters. And sooner or later he faces the hard fact that volunteer, transient help will not provide the specialized, expert service his program standards require. So he seeks a good staff of highly skilled workers and an expanding salary budget to retain them and to meet growing needs.

Among our university stations in America there are some without any independent operating budget whatever. Others have as little as \$600 to \$3000 specifically appropriated for broadcasting. They operate with services and facilities loaned or donated by other departments, and how they manage to keep going at all is a wonder. There's really something sort of noble about the unselfishness and the economy which sustain a radio service with little or no money for direct financing.

But there's something timid about it, too, something meek about the acceptance of radio service as a donation from other university departments or agencies. For the sake of expediency in the face of budget slashes and a narrow concept of the importance of radio, we have all experienced an attitude of caution in requesting funds. But the station director must now dare to seek generous appropriations for his work. We must all quit boasting about or bemoaning our "limited means". We should refer with shame instead of pride to our "lack of funds". We must remind ourselves and others that public education in the American democracy is a democratic responsibility, that it is conducted at public expense, and that education by radio is properly a part of public education. Depend upon it, radio education costs money, and we, the people, must pay for it. It will never come as a gift from commercial broadcasters.

Wanted, then: more courage on the part of university station directors in requesting funds for radio education, and more appreciation of radio values on the part of public administrators and legislators. To make this need known and understood is part of the university station director's job.

In Wisconsin WHA is at present operating on a budget of \$20,000 annually, providing a broadcasting service of nine hours daily the year round with a staff of eight full-time and four part-time workers. This does not include generous

contributions of personal services by the Colleges of Agriculture and Engineering, building maintenance by the University, and the help of 15 NYA student workers. And of course it does not include contributions of program talent and effort from other university branches, state agencies, and governmental departments. To some other university stations this annual operating budget of \$20,000 may seem generous, even vast. To our friends in the radio entertainment business it appears trifling. They scoff at the meager amounts set aside for education on the air. And whether we like it or not, they are entitled to some scorn. But some day, we hope, we shall all come to see the everlasting value of a publicly-supported broadcasting service operating in the interests of education and social improvement. Then our university stations will be adequately financed, and the cost, though considerable, will be small in comparison with the social benefits achieved through the spread of truth and understanding.

We come now to Problem Number Three: Programs. In a sense this is the least and the greatest of the university station director's problems. Least, because the university itself is a rich storehouse of radio program material. The combined wisdom, experience, and understanding of a university community offer an inexhaustible wealth of talent and program content. Here associated in one place are persons whose knowledge embraces all sciences and all arts. Here are lecturers who fill their halls with students, teachers who devote their summers to travel and research, scholars who can present and interpret the best in foreign cultures. Here are scientific explorers, travelers, musicians, and authors.

In a dim laboratory somewhere on the campus late at night there's a quiet but gripping search for the unknown. In a fourth floor classroom somewhere a gifted teacher inspires students to find new experiences in books. Somewhere a historian opens up vistas into the life and thought of the past. In a crowded lecture room somewhere a professor guides his students in a grasp of world affairs and of their place in the scheme of things. Somewhere, everywhere in a great university there is constantly going on that finest of earthly endeavors, the quest for knowledge and understanding. Here, then is the radio director's paradise of potential programs. Here is the home of radio education, a center of cultural growth and extension, the only kind of home from which true education may be expected to emanate.

But how to convert this wealth of potential talent and material into appealing radio programs? -- that is the station director's task now. How to select and train writers,

speakers, and actors? Look enviously at professional broadcasters and try to follow their pattern? Perhaps. But better still, we might dig in and develop our own techniques for effective use of the radio. And here again the facilities, the potentialities, for this development are to be found right on the university campus. In Speech classes, English composition, journalism courses, forensic training -- in these and other fields there is constant study and experiment in effective expression, a search for the means of being interesting and convincing. Here the director will find talented persons who develop amazingly under guidance. He will set up a training class for announcers, a group for actors, and an intimate club for writers. He will conduct a radio speech clinic periodically for faculty members. He will record their voices and show them how they can improve their radio style. He will audition public-spirited citizens and teachers. And he will find among these plenty of interesting, eager, vibrant personalities. Don't tell me that education is dead and that all teachers are dull. I know better, and the director who is prepared to give broadcast training and opportunity knows that he can discover and develop techniques and performers with abundant appeal.

Naturally, the station director will not attempt to carry on all this training alone. His staff will include specialists prepared to help others. He will have close association with numerous participating organizations, teachers' associations, parent groups, music clubs, literary circles, and others. He will help to introduce radio instruction and appreciation into various phases of university courses, into speech, dramatics, journalism, and educational methods, into teachers' institutes and public discussions. He will demonstrate wherever possible the unique service which his station is capable of giving.

Through all this the university station director will have overcome his awe of professional radio and Broadway entertainment devices. He will be a bit skeptical of that something called "showmanship". He will recognize that broadcasting requires certain techniques but that the essentials of effective communication are as old as society itself. He will be convinced that he has close about him all of the elements needed for the development of successful educational radio programs. And he will steadfastly assert the falsehood of a statement by one of the big networks that: "All broadcasting is predicated upon entertainment....broadcasting is a professional occupation." Any attempted reform which takes broadcasting facilities from professional control and hands them over to non-professional control is a menace to good broadcasting."

We come now to Problem Number Four: Promotion. Indirectly I have already touched upon this topic, I believe. I have referred to attitudes of indifference which must be overcome, to inadequate funds due to a lack of support, and have mentioned some means of establishing public backing for education on the air. In a way the director who regards this as his key problem is right. Other obstacles hinge upon the problem of promotion. Certainly, faculty members and other educators will not participate unless they are convinced of the wisdom of university broadcasting. Certainly the legislature will not lay any money in our lap until we have interpreted and demonstrated the extent of our public service. And assuredly the Federal Communications Commission will not voluntarily offer improved facilities. These goals must be reached through promotional efforts of a high order.

It is not enough that a university station director devise and present a superior radio program service. These programs must be publicized. Their results must be interpreted. Faculty, listeners, and the general public must be kept informed of developments. Newspaper listing and description of programs are essential, for we might as well admit that we all have the habit of looking in the newspaper to see what we can find on the radio. People must be told and told repeatedly of what we are doing. It's queer, of course, how much people will believe when told often enough in print or over the radio. I frequently think of how the name of an ordinary violinist has been ballyhooed into a national by-word, and it occurs to me then that we in educational broadcasting have a great deal to learn about publicity.

I think I shall not go into detail about promotion methods and devices. Everyone is familiar with the desirability of forming participating relationships with various organizations, and I have mentioned a few of these groups already. Let me report just briefly on two or three recent activities at the University of Wisconsin. Last month we had as guests in our studio one evening the faculty members of Sigma Xi, honorary society of scientists. Some sixty members, including wives and husbands, were there. We gave them a tour of the broadcasting plant and a brief explanation of the engineering aspects; we recounted the rich background of early radio exploration by university scientists; we described and interpreted current programs and aims; we auditioned and recorded the voices of a number of those present. It was a delightful evening, resulting in new friends and a better understanding of the place of radio on a university campus. Now, of course, we have had similar meetings for other groups in the past, many of them, in fact. But we were impressed by this opportunity to demonstrate and interpret to a group of scientists something of the social uses of radio. Naturally,

we plan to continue this type of demonstration and have already scheduled several meetings.

Even more significant is the formation in Wisconsin last Spring of a Committee on School Broadcasting, representing the Wisconsin Education Association of more than 20,000 teachers. We now have a group of teachers keenly concerned about the place of radio in the school, active in planning classroom broadcasts, and eager to study techniques of effective school use of radio. Under this state committee and a sub-committee, teachers themselves are developing programs for schools and devising lesson aids. They are planning a series of radio institutes at various centers about the state to demonstrate the reception and use of classroom broadcasts, and to discuss local problems. More about the work of this state Committee on School Broadcasting is being reported in another section of this conference by Mrs. Lois Nemec of our State Department of Public Instruction.

Through cordial relations such as these with teachers, school authorities, parent groups, and civic organizations, the work of developing and interpreting the unique service of a university radio station proceeds. But there is still much to be done. There are still many problems to be faced and overcome. And as I remarked in the beginning, I believe the university station director's chief problem arises out of the failure of educators and the public generally to realize that there is a problem in educational broadcasting. It's so easy to hope that finer tastes and unselfish aims will ultimately emerge and assert themselves.

However, I am convinced, as I said in closing my statement before the Federal Communications Commission at the October Allocation Hearing, that: Only by establishing and generously supporting college and university radio stations will we have full exploration rather than exploitation of the social influences of broadcasting.

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